

## **This Time Tomorrow**

*(Readings: Philippians 3. 17-end; Luke 13. 31-end)*

Over the years, I've lost count of how many people who, when they discover I'm a vicar, feel the immediate need to apologise for their colourful language. My response always is to reassure them that I myself am no stranger to profanity!

I expect they think I'll disapprove; that somehow vicars live on a higher moral plain than everyone else. The truth is, of course, that Christians (especially the professional ones) are every bit as human as the next man or woman. And we, of all people, should be the very last to judge.

This reputation for being judgemental, humourless, and, frankly, just a bit boring, unfortunately comes with the territory. And of course, like any stereotypes, it has some justification, which is ironic really because the Christ we claim to follow was so very far from boring; Jesus cracked jokes, enjoyed parties; he mixed with scholars and sex workers; he told stories that flipped culture and religion on its head, and he talked about life in all its glory and fullness.

Somewhere along the way, Christianity seems to have made following Christ more about following rules. And that's understandable; moral boundaries have their place. But, in doing so, we've created dividing lines which only polarise; make being Christian more about what we don't do, rather than the human flourishing Jesus spoke about. We draw lines between what is holy and what is profane, between body and soul, sacred and secular. And this Sacred/Secular Divide, or SSD for short, has become something of a virus that has wormed its way into the DNA of the Church, where we hold certain things to belong to the realm of God/religion/the holy and then there's everything else. We've become infected with this idea that some compartments of our lives are more important to God than others. And that, of course, couldn't be further from the truth. The

truth is everything belongs; everything is spiritual; everything connected. That word holy, which is too often hijacked by SSD, should instead, I think, be spelt with a 'w'; w h o l y.... Because holiness is about being whole; about being the best version of ourselves; being fully connected and integrated with self, God and others. Wholiness - capital W - is another word for shalom; that Hebrew word that describes a state of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing; all of which is spiritual.

God is intimately involved with, and interested in, all areas of our lives, because if one thing matters, everything matters.

Regrettably, passages like this extract from the letter to the Philippian church seem at first glance to support the sacred/secular divide. Here, Paul contrasts our lowly or earthly bodies with Christ's glorious or heavenly body. He insists our citizenship is in heaven not earth. What I believe Paul is actually talking about, however, is bringing body, mind, soul under Christ's control so that body, mind and soul can be transformed, reconfigured, made whole in the here and now.

We'll come back to SSD later, but first let's take a look at this episode from the life of Jesus we read earlier. Rewind a few days and we find that Jesus has begun to set his face towards Jerusalem, the city where he believed his ultimate destiny would be played out. And this was, let's be clear, a death wish. He was walking into the enemy territory. And that explains this advice from a group of sympathetic Pharisees. Herod Antipas, they report, son of Herod the Great, the man who tried to exterminate Jesus as a child, now wants to do what his father failed in doing; exterminate the man.

And, never one to mince his words, Jesus' reply is defiant: 'Tell that fox,' he says, 'I will keep doing what I've been doing today, tomorrow and on the third day I will reach my goal'.

Was this third day a premonition, perhaps, of resurrection? Maybe. What's clear is that Jesus had a strong sense of vocation; he knew exactly what he was called to do 'today, tomorrow, and the next day'.

What about us? Do we have a similar sense of vocation? Do we believe that what we are doing today and tomorrow and the next day is (a) important to God, and (b) our vocation, our calling?

Our talk of vocation is often another symptom of SSD. We talk easily of priesthood and other forms of church ministry as vocation. We might even extend that to teachers or doctors and nurses etc. But do we realise that whatever we are doing this time tomorrow is our vocation; is of equal importance to God? And that's not just those of us in paid work, it's whatever we spend our days doing – caring for grandchildren or aging parents, doing the weekly shop or taking the dog for a walk, bringing in the bins for a neighbour, making the kids' packed lunch, having a coffee with someone, visiting a friend in hospital. Whatever you are doing this time tomorrow; that is your vocation.

That shift in mindset is a powerful thing. What we do and how we do it matters to God and to the greater picture of his kingdom coming. How we speak to others; our attitude to work, how we invest our time and care matters, because all of this is spiritual.

When I left art college, dreams in tact of becoming a fashion designer, very quickly I felt reality bite when I couldn't get that dream job. And so I found a job in retail, thinking, I'll do this for a few months to tie me over, and then years later I was still there, feeling more and more bitter and begrudging. I believed I was born for better, and so the days dragged and I resented everything and I

completely failed to see that life, that my vocation, was what I was living then and there, and not reserved for me somewhere in some perfect future.

I now wish I had heard the advice of a wise priest who years later told me: 'Wherever you are, be there'. In other words, don't wish away or waste the moment you are in; inhabit each moment because it's precious and important and never to be repeated. Find the joy and meaning of each moment, however boring or dull, because life is what is happening to you while you're making plans for it. This realisation that our highest calling is to be present to who we are with now and to what we are doing now can make all the difference in the world.

So, a question then: What will you be doing this time tomorrow? Whatever that is, that is your vocation, your calling.

I wonder if I can ask you just to turn to the person next to you and (a) ask what they will be doing and then (b) ask, 'How can I pray for you?'.